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POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

COMMENT

A CENTURY IN ILLINOIS

ILLINOIS has been celebrating, with speeches, a poetic pageant, and the dedication of monuments, the centennial of her admission to the Union. Every imaginative mind must have accepted this challenge to review the dramatic history of those hundred years and thrill over the prodigious epic they unfold. The beautiful wilderness of flower-tossing prairies changing into one of the world's great granaries, coal-fields, manufactories; criss-crossing with railroads and word-bearing, light-carrying wires; building up villages, towns, and one of the most populous and powerful cities on earth; founding institutions and governments, quarrelling, legislating, fighting fierce wars; nursing and developing great men, including the soldier who led the Union troops to victory and the president whom time is crowning as one of the mightiest spirits of the ages: is it not an incomparable story, a fantastic dream come true, a poem beyond the reach of genius, however plumed and starred?

A tradition like this is an immeasurably precious heritage for the people of Illinois and the whole Middle-West, and disregard of it would be a menace to our civilization. By a fault of our American character we are too neglectful of such traditions, and it is the province of art to produce imperishable reminders which shall avail to keep great days, great deeds, great men, in memory. It is not strange, no cause for despair, if we have not yet produced art which

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measures up to our history—epoch-making deeds must have their day before art can build above them the stuff of dreams. It may be a platitude to repeat that our pioneer ancestors were living, instead of writing, their epics, tragedies, lyrics of joy and pain; but the platitude hides a profound truth—the mighty imaginative stimulus of the wilderness, the stupendous continental dreams which led those men and women on.

With many globe-trotting Americans the historic sense is over-sentimentalized: they weep for fallen Cæsars in the Forum, they make Stratford-on-Avon a place of pilgrimage, and on the shores of our virginal Great Lakes they long for the glamour of a peopled and sorrow-haunted past. Foolish!—are they unworthy of their fathers, whose hearts felt the glamour of the present and whose far-seeing eyes visioned the future? Shall we not emulate the pioneers, who were inspired by the inviolate freedom of the vast wilderness confronting them? A spirit like theirs, if we possess it and act upon it as they did, will construct the future of the world.

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But Illinois, even now, need not be ashamed of her art-history. She would not need to be ashamed of it if her list were limited to one name, that of Abraham Lincoln, the greatest literary artist the nation has produced, whose speeches are prose-poems of incomparable beauty. And Chicago—why do we hear puny apologists for Chicago, who has no need of such mistaken service? Is not Chicago, by admission of that dyed-in-the-wool New Yorker, Henry L.

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Mencken, "the most civilized city in America," possessed of "the mysterious something, a spirit that broods upon the face of the waters"? Is there not a feeling of youth in her, a feeling big and free and many-colored and conquering, like the oceanic lake at her right hand—a feeling from the inmost heart of the nation, as Lake Michigan is the focal centre of a continent?

Chicago, Illinois, the Middle-West—this vital and vitalizing section—needs only, in art, the spirit it has shown in other things—the spirit of active and immediate response to the need of the hour. It is in this spirit that Chicago invented the sky-scraper, in this spirit that she brought forth *The Spoon River Anthology* and *Chicago Poems*, in this spirit—let me hope—that POETRY was founded and that many greater things will be achieved in the future of our dreams.

The most dangerous enemy of this spirit is self-distrust—a certain colonialism which leans upon London, Paris, New York, thus bidding our artists imitate instead of create, or exiling them instead of keeping them at home. Every artistic venture confronts the benumbing influence of this enemy, meets the facile temptation to become itself colonial. When POETRY began, for example, two courses were open: it could have become, what *The Little Review* is now, the organ of a choice little London group of superintellectualized ultimates and expatriates; or, as I hope it has become, the organ of a higher and more conscious, concentrated and independent imaginative life in this country. The first course would

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have been comparatively easy—I remember with what cordial kindness a poet in exile once offered to conduct from London our entire prose section!—and, since the editorials would no doubt have been very clever, and very scornful of most things American, we should unquestionably have been praised by some of the choicest spirits on both sides of the water, and should have acquired by this time a much longer list of subscribers.

The other course, however, seemed more important, though much more difficult and less immediately rewarding. Our enormous (potential) constituency may not yet be sympathetically aware of our effort to make its poetic impulse independently self-assured and articulate, but it can not deny that POETRY has achieved, is achieving, something of this purpose. It has set in motion far-travelling currents of influence; it has gathered together and brought into sympathetic contact a group of poets now widely recognized—a group which, let us hope, Chicago will cherish instead of shooing away. The word coterie is perhaps over-despised. Coterie having been necessary and effective in Athens, Rome, Florence, Paris and London, they are of course equally necessary, and may prove equally effective, in Chicago. A coterie is but a group of people working together, and teamwork is required in the arts, as in everything else, if anything save benumbing isolation is to be accomplished. If POETRY can help to develop and make articulate the imaginative life of the nation—as when, for example, it wrings out of a poet's over-modest reluctance the beautiful Chip-

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pewa monologues in the present number—then its editors will be more proud than of having introduced the imagists, important as that episode was in our earliest history and the literary history of our period.

So let us raise the flag of Illinois, be a part of its centennial, and help to make its future more glorious, ever more vital and inspiring in the life of the nation and the world.

H. M.

AN INTERNATIONAL EPISODE

Some of our readers have asked me what number of *The English Review* would contain my reply to Edgar Jepson's article of last May. Let me answer the question with the following correspondence:

Mr. Austin Harrison, Editor of The English Review, to Miss Monroe, returning the latter's manuscript, "Mr. Jepson and United States Poetry":

Dear Miss Monroe:

I really think it is hardly necessary to enter into a controversy over Jepson's article. We are very full at this moment and I could not in any case find room now.

Miss Harriet Monroe to Mr. Austin Harrison:

My dear Mr. Harrison:

Your letter of July 9th, returning my comments on Mr. Jepson, reminds me of the Kaiser's reply to Belgium. You invade our province, quite uninvited and undesired, and kill off its most prominent citizens. Then, when I protest, you inform me that "it is hardly necessary to enter into a controversy."

It would have been more in accordance with the British tradition of fair play if this consideration had caused you to decline Mr. Jepson's egregiously caddish article.

And so ends an international episode.

Or perhaps not quite ends. For *The Little Review*, now under the dictatorship of Ezra Pound, reprints a condensa-